

**OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY**  
**News and Information Bureau**

**PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ WITH DFA ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
FOR ASIAN AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS NEAL IMPERIAL**

DECEMBER 29, 2022 [12:51 P.M. – 1:12 P.M.]

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** [Airing starts] briefing sa taong ito. Ibabahagi namin sa inyo ang paghahanda para sa state visit ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. sa China sa susunod na linggo, sa January 3 to 5, 2023.

Pero bago iyan, narito muna ang mga bagong appointees ng Board of Directors ng Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority at PAGCOR. Para sa Board of Directors ng SBMA: Allan Troy Dandan Baquir, member representing the national government; Edilberto Salgo Mozo, member, representing business and investment sectors; Tomas Fausto Lahom III, member representing business and investment sectors; Honorario Cabaguio Allado III, acting member representing the private sector; Jose Mari Balandra Ponce, acting member representing private sector; Kenneth Lemuel Go Ramentilla, acting member representing the private sector; Amable Bancod Tolentino, acting member representing private sector; and, Maria Cecilia Bobadilla-Bitare, acting member representing the private sector; at para sa na-appoint na Chairman ng Games and Amusement Board, si Mr. Richard Santos Clarin.

Iyan ang mga bagong appointments.

And then ngayon naman, para bigyan tayo ng overview ng state visit, makakasama natin si Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Department of Foreign Affairs Neal Imperial. But bago iyan, babasahin ko muna ang reason for the state visit to China.

The President's visit to China will be his first state visit outside of ASEAN. China is one of the Philippines' major economic partners – 20% of the Philippines' total trade is with China. It has also become an important player for inbound foreign direct investments and development assistance to the country, particularly infrastructure projects. And to tell us more about that, please welcome DFA Assistant Secretary for Asian and Public Affairs Neal Imperial.

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Maraming salamat, Ms. Daphne Paez. And magandang tanghali po sa inyong lahat and Happy New Year, Usec. Garafil and members of the Malacañang Press Corps.

The state visit of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to the People's Republic of China will take place on January 3 to 5, 2023. The President will be joined by the First Lady, former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Speaker of the House of Representatives Martin Romualdez, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo, the Secretary of Finance, the Secretary of Trade and Industry, the Secretary of Tourism, the Secretary of Information and Communications Technology and other Cabinet secretaries whose presence may be needed to sign bilateral agreements with their Chinese counterparts.

The Department of Foreign Affairs considers the state visit of great significance. It will be the first bilateral visit of the President to a non-ASEAN country since assuming the presidency. It will be the second face-to-face meeting between the two heads of state in less than two months. With both leaders receiving a fresh mandate in recent elections, there is an expectation that the state visit will set the tone of bilateral relations between the two countries in the next five to six years.

The state visit is also expected to reaffirm the cordial and neighborly relations between the two countries, ensure continuity in many facets of the bilateral relationship and chart new areas of engagement. It is also expected to build on the growing trade and investment ties between the two economies as well as address security issues of mutual concern.

During the state visit, between 10 to 14 bilateral government agreements are expected to be signed. These agreements represent cooperation in a broad range of areas which include trade and investments, agriculture, renewable energy, infrastructure, development cooperation, people-to-people ties and maritime security cooperation.

The President will depart Manila in the early afternoon of January 3 and will arrive in Beijing in the early evening. The official activities of the President will begin on January 4 with three important meetings with the Chinese leaders. His first meeting will be with Li Zhanshu, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress which is equivalent to the Philippine Legislature. His second meeting will be with Premier Li Keqiang and his final and third meeting will be with his counterpart, President Xi Jinping. President Xi will host a dinner banquet for the President, the First Lady and Cabinet officials after their meeting.

A sizeable business delegation will be joining the President's trip. Business meetings will be held on January 4 and 5; and a number of major business deals are scheduled to be signed and finalized during the state visit. China, after all is our country's largest trading partner, our largest source of imports and second largest export destination.

The President will depart China for Manila on January 5, ending his state visit.

And I'm now open to answer your questions if you have some. Do you have any?

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Okay. We will be taking some questions from the media. We have Vanz Fernandez from Police Files.

**VANZ FERNANDEZ/POLICE FILES:** Yes, ma'am, Police Files and DZRJ. Bakit pa rin itutuloy ng ating Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos ang pagbisita niya sa China sa kabila ng pagtaas ng COVID-19 doon?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Ang ating ugnayang panlabas sa China ay napakaimportante and we have received assurances from our Chinese hosts that all arrangements are being made to ensure the safety of the President and his delegation during the visit. And the bubble arrangement has been agreed for the Philippine delegation to minimize the risk of exposure to the virus. And you know, may mga pagbisita talaga na hindi natin puwedeng i-postpone.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** From Katrina Domingo of ABS-CBN...

**KATRINA DOMINGO/ABS-CBN:** Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista said that the Philippines should be cautious and consider stricter travel requirements for travelers coming from China to the Philippines. What is the DFA's position to this? Are you amenable to the Philippines re-imposing the mandatory RT-PCR requirements and other travel restrictions such as mandatory quarantine for Chinese travelers?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Well, the position of the Department of Foreign Affairs is the position of the IATF on COVID-related matters and we have not received any advisory from the IATF for

now. But as far as the visit is concerned, every precaution is being undertaken to ensure that the delegation is not infected and does not bring back to the Philippines the new variants of the virus. So, I hope that answers the question.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** We have a question from Julie Baeza of One PH.

**JULIE BAEZA/ONE PH:** Sir, will there be a discussion about West Philippine Sea and the planned joint oil and gas exploration?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Yeah. Well, on the WPS, the President wants a peaceful and stable situation in the West Philippine Sea, and we'll continue to uphold our country's sovereignty and sovereign rights during his meetings with Chinese leaders.

And under energy cooperation, the President may raise or continue his discussion with President Xi which began by the way during their initial meeting in Bangkok on oil and gas cooperation.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Thank you. From AFP, we have Mikhail Flores.

**MIKHAIL FLORES/AFP:** Asec., Bloomberg had a report last week about construction activities in unoccupied features in the Spratly and DFA has expressed concerned related to this development. Will the President bring up this issue with President Xi and what message is the President or what message does the President intend to convey with his counterpart, particularly on these developments that infringe on our sovereignty?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Well, we do not wish to pre-empt or second-guess what the President will say to his counterparts, but the President will raise important issues affecting our bilateral relations among them the issue on the West Philippine Sea. So, we can't say how specific the discussions will be.

**MIKHAIL FLORES/AFP:** But how would you characterize this, because you mentioned that the President wants a peaceful and stable discussion but obviously this is point of tension in terms of our relation with China?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Yes. In his meetings with Chinese leaders including President Xi, the President will discuss the full range of our bilateral relations, both of the positive aspects of it and the sensitive aspects of our relations, which includes the issue of the West Philippine Sea and China's activities in the area.

The President has said that the maritime issue do not define the totality of our bilateral relations with China, but nevertheless, he acknowledges the importance of this issue to our interest, and to the Filipino people.

So, we expect that this issue will be discussed in the President's meetings with Chinese leaders.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Question from Ivan Mayrina of GMA 7.

**IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7:** Thank you, ma'am. Asec, may we be clarified kung ano ho ang plano ng Philippine delegation kung sakali, mahigpit po kasi iyong protocols ng Beijing pagdating sa mga kung sakaling mag-positive etc., ano ho ang plano naman natin kung sakali nga, huwag naman sana na may mag-positive?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Well, kailangan nating sundin siyempre ang protocols and restrictions ng Chinese government for the rest of the delegation. Kung mayroon man magpositibo, natural na kailangan siya ma-quarantine and ma-isolate until gumaling siya. And only then will that person be allowed to return to the Philippines.

**IVAN MAYRINA/GMA 7:** May nakalagay po kasi na magtsa-charter ng flight to bring back the positive person to the Philippines. Have the arrangements to that effect been made by the Philippines side?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Well, all arrangements are made 'no for every possible scenario. But in general that's how it is: If a person tests positive he is supposed to isolate, and of course that person cannot join the flight of the President for obvious reasons, right? So, that person will have to wait until he tests negative before that person will go back to the Philippines because we also have to protect the Philippines from the spread of these new variants in China.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Okay. Maricel Halili.

**MARICEL HALILI/TV-5:** Hi, sir, magandang hapon po. Sir, does it mean, well, because of the cases of COVID-19 does it mean na the President will not meet the Filipino community in China?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** That's correct. There will be no meeting between the President and the Filipino community, unfortunately, because of the situation there. You know, it's too bad but we have to follow the COVID protocols there in China. So, there cannot be any big gatherings 'no which is usually what the President does; when he goes overseas he meets the Filipino community in big gatherings.

**MARICEL HALILI/TV-5:** Sir, just a clarification doon sa question ni Ivan kanina about the quarantine. Does it mean na kapag may nag-positive doon sa delegation, sa hospital ba sila maka-quarantine, and will they ride a commercial flight going back to the Philippines once na nag-negative, ganoon po ba?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Well, our understanding is for the official delegation, there is a special facility for isolation.

**MARICEL HALILI/TV-5:** Salamat, sir.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** From Eden Santos.

**EDEN SANTOS:** Asec, follow up lang po doon kay Maricel. Who will shoulder po doon sa gastos if in case po na may mag-positive sa mga kasama sa delegasyon?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Well, that's being worked out between the two sides.

**EDEN SANTOS:** And one more thing, kasi po nakalagay doon sa advisory ay January 3 to 6. Ibig po bang sabihin iyong mas pinaikling panahon ng pagbisita ng Pangulo sa China ay kahit papaano ay natakot pa din siya doon sa posibleng surge po ng kaso ng COVID?

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Well, no. The original schedule was January 3 to 5/6. So, the President always had that option of leaving on the fifth, and that's what's going to happen.

So, there's no decision to shorten the visit; it's basically a schedule.

**EDEN SANTOS:** Thank you po.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Okay. I think that is all we have, if that's enough for today.

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** May I just add some additional information. As was mentioned earlier, China is a very important economic partner of the Philippines, so one of the main focuses of this visit is really to foster stronger economic cooperation. So, we expect a big business delegation to join the President's delegation, and there will be a lot of business deals that will be signed.

Well, we will leave that matter to the DTI to explain further, and we don't want to pre-empt the news about the total investment pledges that will be made but there's a very strong expectation that you know there's great interest from Chinese investors in the Philippine economy especially in Philippine agriculture, and renewable energy, and nickel processing. China imports 70% of its nickel ore and concentrates requirements from the Philippines. So, there's a lot of potential in those sectors.

And also, we expect an agreement on the importation of Durian to be finalized, and the Chinese market has a voracious appetite for Durian. So, we expect a lot of interest in our Durian exports, and also possible investments in the Durian producing regions in Mindanao. So, you can call that as some form of Durian diplomacy I guess, yeah.

And there are other agreements: For example to avoid miscalculation and miscommunication in the West Philippine Sea, both sides have agreed to sign an agreement establishing direct communication between the foreign ministries of both countries at various levels, and that is expected to be signed by Secretary Manalo and his counterpart State Counsellor, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi during the visit.

And also, we plan to renew the agreement on our participation in the Belt and Road Initiative of China which we believe complements the infrastructure program of the administration.

Let me check if there are still other agreements worth mentioning. Yes, there's also a planned memorandum of understanding on digital cooperation which will be signed by our Secretary of Trade and Industry. It has to do with exchange of best practices and capacity building in digital connectivity, data-emerging technologies, among other areas of cooperation.

Also, we are looking at possible grants from China amounting to 1.5 billion renminbi. And the framework for the three priorities bridges crossing Pasig-Marikina River, and the Manggahan Floodway Bridges construction project.

And, this is very important too, we expect an agreement to be signed on tourism cooperation called implementation program of the MOU on tourism cooperation. As you well know, China was our second largest source of tourism in 2019. There were almost 1.8 million Chinese tourists who visited the Philippines. And now that China is planning to reopen – hopefully, after it recovers from this surge in COVID cases – we want to resume people-to-people exchanges. We think it will be a big boost to our tourism sector for its recovery after the pandemic.

So, that's it.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Thank you very much.

**DFA ASEC. IMPERIAL:** Thank you.

**MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ:** Thank you very much, DFA Assistant Secretary for Asian and Public Affairs Neal Imperial for the very comprehensive briefing. And this ends our briefing for today; for the year, I wish you all a Happy New Year. Thank you.

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